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SUBJECT: JERUSALEM MEDIA REACTION (02/04): FEAR THAT SEPARATION OF
GAZA WILL BECOME PERMANENT

Main Stories:

All papers front page and Al Quds leads with statements by Secretary Clinton from her press conference with Special Envoy Mitchell on February 3. Coverage highlights the statement identifying the U.S. goal to establish an "independent and viable Palestinian state." The papers also highlight quotes about continued work with Palestinian Authority President Abbas and the need for Hamas to end rocket attacks. Al Quds' lead photo shows Clinton and Mitchell at the press conference and reporting welcomes news that Mitchell has asked President Obama and Secretary Clinton for a Jerusalem office and staff in order to better monitor issues on the ground and coordinate with U.S. diplomats in the field. The paper calls the request a, "sign of U.S. desires to directly engage in negotiations." Al Ayyam's headline highlights that Mitchell will return to the region this month, after Israeli elections. Al Hayat Al Jadida's coverage highlights Clinton's commitment to assisting Palestinians and Israel to reach a negotiated agreement to the conflict.

Al Quds front pages and Al Ayyam and Al Hayat Al Jadida lead with the February 3 meeting of Arab foreign ministers in Abu Dhabi. Reporting notes that the meeting was closed to press and focused on, "preventing non-Arab interference" in regional issues, resolving Arab differences before the Doha Arab summit, supporting the Palestinian Authority under President Abbas, and recognition of the PLO as the sole, legitimate representative of the Palestinian people.

Al Quds' front page cites news agencies in reporting that Israel has threatened a tough response to a grad missile fired on Ashkelon on February 3. The paper notes Israeli Foreign Minister Livni's call for "hard" Israeli retaliation, while Israeli Defense Minister Barak is quoted commenting that though Hamas was dealt a powerful blow in the war, rocket attacks from Gaza remain a serious matter.

Meanwhile, Al Ayyam's front page quotes Israeli opposition leader Netanyahu stating that he would seek to topple Hamas rule in Gaza. Al Quds' front page reports that the Hamas delegation in Cairo continued meetings with Egyptian Intelligence Chief Sulayman regarding a truce with Israel in Gaza. Al Ayyam's front page quotes Hamas delegation member Bardawil confirming by telephone to Ma'an news agency on February 3 that Hamas has approved a truce proposal that would "lift 75% of the Gaza siege" and has agreed to join Palestinian unity talks on February 22. Palestinian Authority (PA) President Abbas hopes that the outcome of Israeli elections will not set Palestinian-Israeli negotiations, "back to square one." Speaking in Paris, Abbas expressed his belief that talks with Israel in recent months have allowed each side to better understand the demands and expectations of the other. Al Ayyam adds that Abbas announced that France has pledged to rebuild the Al Quds hospital in Gaza after it was destroyed in recent Israeli military operations. In other official Palestinian statements, Al Quds and Al Hayat Al Jadida front page reports that the PLO Palestinian National Council rejected the Hamas proposal to establish a new political body to represent Palestinians at their February 3 meeting in Ramallah. The papers also report, in separate front page coverage, that PA Premier Fayyad will make a speech on February 4 about Gaza. Fayyad is expected to demand the entry of cash into the Strip and to elaborate on PA plans for Gaza reconstruction, according to coverage. Al Ayyam's front page cites Reuters in quoting EU Special Representative Mark Otte expressing frustration over Israeli restrictions on goods entering Gaza, thereby hindering reconstruction efforts. Speaking in Jerusalem, Otte questioned how specific EU assistance activities could be viewed as, "encouraging

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terrorism": repairs to the sewage system, provision of clean water, repairs to hospitals. In other Gaza news, Al Hayat Al Jadida's front page runs an AFP story on the International Criminal Court's General Prosecutor questioning the legitimacy of the Hamas "government" in Gaza and Hamas ability to implement a court ruling there.

Al Hayat Al Jadida's front page runs a Reuters story on statements by Turkish Premier Erdogan expressing Turkey's readiness to mediate between Israel and the Palestinians. Erdogan also noted that U.N. Secretary General Ki-moon has asked him to resume mediation efforts between the two parties, according to reporting. Settler news grabs front page headlines in Al Quds and inside Al Ayyam. The reports highlight the injuring of seven Palestinians during clashes with Israeli soldiers and settlers in Sair village near Hebron and with soldiers in Bil'in near Ramallah. The papers report that clashes erupted in Sair when Palestinians saw Israeli soldiers protecting settlers who had brought bulldozers to destroy Palestinian agricultural land. In related news, Al Quds carries an inside story and photo of the Al Kurd house in the East Jerusalem neighborhood of Sheikh Jarrah from which an Palestinian family was evicted by the Israeli Jerusalem Municipality late last year. Reporting notes that the "Israeli settlers" who now occupy the house, sealed its windows with bricks and have not been evicted despite Israeli court orders to that effect. The paper further notes that many Palestinian parties have appealed Israeli courts to order the Municipality and police to implement the eviction orders.

Coverage of U.S. Consulate General Jerusalem mission activities appears on inside pages of Al Quds. The paper covers the February 3 visit by Consul General Walles to Al Quds University, noting that he discussed in detail with university officials, "the current political situation in Palestine following the war on Gaza and its implications for the region." University President Nussaybah is quoted calling on President Obama to immediately push for clear results in the peace process, stressing that after a six month window, the risk increases for a, "swift deterioration" in the region. A second inside story notes that representatives of USAID and the Palestinian Water Authority met on February 3 to discuss future water projects.-----

BLOCK QUOTES:

1) Al Quds' editorial is titled, "Lifting the siege on Gaza, its

airport and seaport" (02/04): "The Israeli army destroyed the Gaza airport in 2001. The Israeli Government has also prevented the rehabilitation of the Gaza sea port to serve larger ships, and the opening of two safe passages to the West Bank... [Crossing points] remain closed to the movement of citizens and goods [between Gaza and the West Bank]... this continued Israeli violation of agreements has resulted in the deepening of the de-facto separation of the two parts of the [Palestinian] homeland... [We note that] the closing of safe passages was done long before Hamas took control of Gaza by force in June 2007. There are 1 and 1/2 million humans in the Gaza Strip that should be treated as humans and not as a political

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bargaining chip by Hamas..."

2) Hamada Farana opines in Al Ayyam under the title, "National partnership needed to face the occupation and the [Hamas]coup": "Will the leaders of Fatah, Popular Front for the Liberation of Palestine, Democratic Front for the Liberation of Palestine, Communists, Nationalists and the independents understand the importance of consolidating and strengthening their alliance to become a [true]partnership? A partnership in the Palestinian

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Authority National government, a partnership in the Fayyad government, a partnership in organizations and a partnership in confronting the coup? [A partnership] to confront oppression and egotism whether it comes from some Fatah leaders or Hamas? ...Partnership is key to... the struggle against the occupation and the coup.

WALLES